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## BRANFORD MARSALIS

ON FAMILY LIFE IN DURHAM,  
VANKEES, SUCCESS, TIGER WOODS,  
RACE, THE TONIGHT SHOW AND  
ALL THAT JAZZ **PAGE 40**

### THE FAMILY MARSALIS

Branford, Nicole,  
Peyton, 10, and  
Thais, 6, in their  
Treyburn home



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# Southern

With a mouth-watering mix of mom-and-pops and big-name restaurants, South Durham is establishing its foodie cred

By Matt Dees | Photography by Briana and Mackenzie Brough







South Durham's dining scene consists of restaurants in shopping centers and big-box chains.

Well, yeah, pretty much. You say that like it's a bad thing. "Chains essentially are successful businesses that started small," says **Becca Gomez Farrell**, a **Woodcroft** resident and frequent contributor to the seminal food blog **Carpe Durham**. "At what point do we decide we hate them? And strip malls. That just means

it's hard to know ahead of time what's there, so you have to, you know, read up before you go."

She sees the bias all the time among the commentariat at **Carpe Durham**, **Yelp** and **Chowhound**. To get "real" Durham food, you have to go somewhere in the vicinity of downtown, according to the conventional wisdom among some foodies.

True, when most people think South Durham, they think

# Cookin'



■ Clockwise from top left: **Dulce Cafe in Sutton Station**; **Rockfish Seafood Grill at Southpoint**; al fresco dining at **The Cheesecake Factory** and **Papa Mojo's Roadhouse in Greenwood Commons**



A short list of the Sergisons' go-to spots: **Akashi**; **Bombay Grille**; **Thai Lanna**; **Papa Mojo's Roadhouse** and **Toledo Butcher Shop** Mexican grocery/carnicería. The latter, she says, "is this little bodega. Half of it is a restaurant where you can order – for peanuts – this incredible Mexican food. The food is unreal and totally authentic. It's a little gem."

When the Sergisons are out with their kids, **Andrew**, 5, and **Campbell**, 2, they often head to Papa Mojo's in **Greenwood Commons**. Before the zydeco cranks up at this award-winning Cajun restaurant owned by chef/musician **Mel Melton**, it's one of the most family-friendly spots around, Jill says.

"I think it's the best restaurant in the area to take children," she says. "They've always been incredible to our kids."

### Thinking outside the box

"A lot of chains lose some of their quality as they expand, no question," Becca concedes. "There are some definite exceptions here, and a huge exception is **Rockfish Seafood Grill**. **Michael Hayek**, the general manager, runs a group called 'SnobFree Wine.' He brings in local beers from **Fullsteam**, **LoneRider**, **Triangle Brewing Co.** and has local Thursday pint nights. They recently did a gluten-free wine dinner. You just don't think wine dinner and chain restaurants."

In a later interview, Hayek said, "There are multiple reasons why I like to work with the local breweries," he says. "The most important reason is it's just a good product. And there's such a passionate craft beer audience in the area that it also makes good business sense."

Becca says Southpoint doesn't just offer run-of-the-mill chains.

"It's hard to complain against **Cheesecake Factory** cheesecake if you need a calorie overload," Becca says. "And the more ardent foodies would say that **Ruth's Chris** probably has Angus Barn beat. There's nothing wrong with convenience, especially convenience with character." ►

### Editor's Picks

**William's Gourmet Kitchen** – Grab a burger or a Belgian waffle

**Ruth's Chris Steak House and The Melting Pot** – Each offers a truly unique, high-quality dining experience

**Backyard BBQ Pit** – Does Eastern N.C. 'cue as well as anyone

**Benetis** – Perfect for a weekend breakfast with the whole family

**Sansui** – A huge selection of fresh sushi, always half price

**Mez & Chubby's Tacos** – Representing two ends of the Mexican food spectrum, they're both lip-smackingly delicious

## Welcome to the Durham Marriott City Center



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■ Sarah's Empanadas have been a lunchtime fave in RTP for more than two decades

## Life on the South Side:

A Three-Part Series on the "Other" Durham

**This issue:** The Dining Scene

**November:** Shoppers' Mecca

**December:** Parks & Rec – Trails, spas, movies and more

**Southpoint**, which means lots of chains. Not that there's anything wrong with them, which we'll address in a bit. But did you know that within a few short miles of the mall are two authentic Korean joints, four sushi restaurants, the first LEED-certified restaurant in the state, an authentic *carnicería*, and Jamaican, Cajun, Chinese, Thai, Italian, Mexican and Indian food galore?

Downtown and thereabouts rightfully get attention for their groundbreaking contributions to our food scene. But, if you think about it, South Durham offers the best of both worlds: authentic locally owned restaurants and a variety of top-shelf brand-name restaurants. As Becca says, you just need to know where to look.

## The revolution was not televised

**T**ony Sustaita saw the transformation first-hand.

"I've been in **Woodcroft Shopping Center** for 15 years," says the owner of **Bandido's** and **Chubby's Tacos**.

"When we opened Bandido's here, there weren't even any chains except for fast food. You didn't come to the Woodcroft area unless you lived here."

What a difference a decade and a half makes. The success of Bandido's led Tony and a partner to open five Chubby's restaurants three years ago, including one in Woodcroft and another in **RTP**.

Tony says **Southpoint** helped the area go from a bedroom community to a destination. Though his restaurants are a mile down the road, he still draws plenty of folks stopping for a bite after a day of shopping or a trip to the movies. But before Southpoint opened in 2002, it was RTP workers that drove the culinary scene. There was a premium not only on speedy service, but on quality and variety. The array of world cuisines found within a few miles of the park reflect the diversity of the workforce there.

**Sarah Quiroga** has managed a robust business for 23 years in a shopping center off **N.C. 55**, despite only opening for weekday lunch. **Sarah's Empanadas**, featuring multiple versions of the delicacy in the style of Sarah's native Bolivia, is a hit with the RTP crowd, who jam the small restaurant every time it opens its doors. "I have customers that have been coming since I opened," she says. "That's the reason I'm still here."

## A slice of Brooklyn

**J**ill Sergison admits to anti-chain bias. She and her husband, **Pete**, lived for years in Brooklyn, where it was the norm to eat out at small, locally owned restaurants of all stripes.

The **Audubon Park** resident hasn't been to the Southpoint area to eat – besides the occasional lunch break during a shopping trip – in three years. "We favor true ethnic food," she says. "If you drive even a mile from that central shopping area, there are some of the best ethnic eateries in the Triangle."



## Becca Gomez Farrell's Picks

**City Beverage:** The inviting patio's always happening on weekends. Try the garlic fries or the pink pussycat gin cocktail.

**Rockfish Seafood Grill:** Check out the new ahi tuna and crab tower

**The Cheesecake Factory:** Because ice cream and fro-yo shops inexplicably close around 9pm, where else are you going to go when your sweet tooth kicks in?

**Nantucket Grill & Bar:** Sit outside and enjoy a giant cranberry bog sandwich and a cup of lobster bisque

**Dulce:** Get an espresso, a scoop of salted caramel gelato and a dark chocolate raspberry tart. Pure bliss.

**West 94th Street Pub:** The shrimp BLT and peanut butter pie exceed pub food standards, but watching the regulars play cornhole is the real draw

**Shiki Sushi:** This trendy sushi spot is well worth the buzz for both the BOGO rolls and the saketinis

**Cafe Meridian:** This RTP lunch spot has the friendliest cashier I've ever met. The changing daily specials and long list of gourmet sandwiches don't disappoint either.

**Papa Mojo's Roadhouse:** Come for the great line-up of New Orleans' jazz bands and stay for amazing Cajun cooking

## Bright future

It was a leap of faith when the **Chapel Hill Restaurant Group** decided to open a new place off of **Page Road**, deep in the heart of RTP. But, three years later, **Mez Contemporary Mexican** is the busiest restaurant of any of the company's Triangle locations, says partner **Pete Dorrance**. "The truth is there were some scary moments there in the beginning," Pete says. "Lunch was great out of the gate, but dinner took some time to build."

The key was to create a restaurant unlike anything else in the market, in this case an upscale Mexican restaurant with such unique offerings as roasted tamarind pecan-crusted salmon and beef brisket with vaquero sauce. The restaurant group also committed to designing the building according to LEED environmental standards, the first restaurant in the state to do so. "People showed up there initially because they were happy we were LEED-certified," Pete says. "It cost more money up front and took longer to open, but we wouldn't have had it any other way."

Pete, along with just about everyone interviewed for this story, sees nothing but growth for the South Durham restaurant market. The company soon will be building another restaurant near Mez.

"We feel like the future is pretty bright," Pete says. "In fact, we're banking on it." **DM**

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